



Yarmouk Martyrs Brigade



Ideology:

The Yarmouk Martyrs Brigade was a rebel group in southern Syria during the Syrian Civil War. For part of its existence it was connected to the Islamic State. It fought against several Syrian Opposition groups for dominance in the Yarmouk Basin. On 21 May 2016, it merged with other Islamist groups into the Khalid ibn al-Walid Army.

The Yarmouk Martyrs Brigade was originally set up in 2012, largely based on "local and familial ties, rather than ideology". At this stage connected to mainstream Syrian rebel bodies like the Supreme Military Council and Southern Front, the brigade became increasingly isolated from other groups, owing to accusations that it was affiliated with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

The group gained attention when it abducted 21 Filipino UN soldiers in early March 2013, releasing them on 10 March 2013. The group justified the kidnapping by claiming that "UN is silent about the crimes of the regime against the Syrian people" and that it provided "aid to the criminal regime forces". After much criticism, however, the brigade changed its position, saying that it had attempted to protect the UN peacekeepers from the "barbaric bombing that Assad's criminal gangs are launching against the western villages of Deraa province and all of Syria."

At this time, the Yarmouk Martyrs Brigade still cooperated with other rebel groups in the war against the government: In course of the 2013 Daraa offensive, the brigade aided the al-Nusra Front in attacking the 38th Division air defence base, and fought with other opposition groups during the capture of several towns south of Nawa. It also participated in a major, yet eventually unsuccessful offensive to capture Nawa itself from the government in July 2013.

It continued to work together with other rebel groups throughout early 2014, stating at the time that its aim was to "fight so that Syrian men and women may choose a free and democratic system that establishes a prosperous state respecting the aspirations of Syrians in the freedom and dignity for which they have fought." By July 2014, the brigade began to clash with other rebel groups such as the Islamic Muthanna Movement, first expressing some kind of affinity to the Islamic State and adopted more Islamic symbols and insignia. Nevertheless, the groups officially remained part of the Southern Front and took part in the First Battle of Al-Shaykh Maskin.

Allegiance to ISIS:

In late 2014, the Yarmouk Martyrs Brigade finally began to openly oppose other rebel groups and increasingly showcased its de facto allegiance to the ISIS. It became involved in a series of low intensity clashes with al-Nusra Front, and in December 2014 Nusra launched an offensive against the brigade until other rebel groups intervened and confined the Brigade to its base in the towns of Jamla and al-Shajarah. In April and May 2015, the brigade, as well as Jaysh al-Jihad, launched attacks on al-Nusra. This fighting ended following arbitration from other local groups.

On 15 November 2015, its head Muhammad "Abu Ali" al-Baridi, nicknamed al-Khal (the Uncle), and five other leaders were killed in a bomb blast in Jamla, the village where the Brigade is headquartered. Al-Nusra Front claimed responsibility for the attack. Abu Obaideh Qahtan, said to have been the effective leader of the brigade anyway, took over as head. Obaideh, a Palestinian-Syrian from the Yarmouk Camp, was not only a founding member of the brigade, but had also much military experience as veteran of the Soviet–Afghan War. Nevertheless, just four months after taking over, he was replaced as head by Abu Abdullah al-Madani, a previously unknown mujahid of Saudi origin. This development was both attributed to Obaideh's lacking administration skills and the strengthening links of the Yarmouk Martyrs Brigade with ISIL, as al-Madani was said to have been sent by the ISIL leadership to lead the brigade. Despite his replacement, Abu Obaideh Qahtan remained a major field commander of the brigade.

On 21 March 2016, the brigade and its ally, the Islamic Muthanna Movement, launched a major offensive against other rebel groups, aiming to take control of the Daraa Governorate. While the two groups were initially able to take control of several villages and towns, opposition forces eventually pushed them back. At least two important brigade commanders were killed during the conflict, among them Abu Tahrir, a Syria Revolutionaries Front defector.

As a result of the failed offensive, the Islamic Muthanna Movement and the Yarmouk Martyrs Brigade were severely weakened, leading to rumors they had merged. On 24 May 2016, they along with Jaysh al-Jihad officially united to form Khalid ibn al-Walid Army, or the Army of Khalid ibn al-Walid, a companion of the Prophet Muhammad.

Date: 25-07-2017